

From war zone to incubator: A little survivor's exodus

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by **Our Correspondent**



Parvathi, the nine-day-old-girl who was brought from war-hit Yemen at an incubator at Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences in Kochi. Her mother Raji is also seen.

Kochi: Parvathi whimpered. Then a hint of smile crossed her tiny lips. Raji too smiled through her tears when her nine-day-old premature baby drifted to a peaceful sleep inside the incubator.

Parvathi was born eight weeks ahead of due date in the war-ravaged Sana'a in Yemen. On day 6, she started her first journey, to Djibouti and then to Kochi as part of a group of refugees fleeing their livelihood in the West Asian country torn between terrorists and a multinational force fighting them. She is on her way to be a healthy baby at the Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences in Kochi.

Raji was living a thriller in the last nine days. She had been working at a hospital in Amran for about 10 years. She had witnessed the insurgency that started in 2004 but that was nothing compared to the current bout of violence.

Raji worked at the hospital through the seventh month of her pregnancy. Raji and husband Sash Kumar wanted to leave Yemen when things got out of control. They came to Sana'a, where Sash Kumar's sister Susha Rani lived. Air traffic was closed by then, leaving the couple stranded. In the meantime, Raji's blood pressure shot up and she had to be hospitalised.

Parvathi was born on April 2. Six days later, a call came from the Indian embassy, setting in motion a gruelling journey for the newborn through the chill and pollution of Sana'a.

Even before they left the capital city, the baby had symptoms of jaundice. More problems waited the family. At the airport, Sash Kumar was denied permission to leave the country as his contract of employment was not over yet. Raji and Susha Rani continued the journey with the baby.

The baby was very weak by the time they reached Djibouti. Dr. Uma Nambiar came to the rescue. The baby was taken to the Al Rahma Hospital in Djibouti. She was kept in an incubator for a day. Though there was a flight ready to fly to India on the evening of April 8, Dr. Uma advised against it as this was not a civilian plane. The next day, they boarded a plane to India, helped by the initiative shown by the doctors.

Dr. Uma, who has been an adviser to the health minister in Djibouti for two years, helped them to get permission to fly with the incubator. The incubator was lifted to the plane using a crane and it was placed in the alley between seats. Dr. Uma could not leave the baby alone. She accompanied her. After the six-hour flight, the baby was taken straight to the Amrita hospital in Kochi.

Raji is still waiting for her husband, a native of Ochira near Kollam. He has finally been given permission to leave Yemen. Last heard, he was on a ship from Djibouti to India. The family is happy about the child even in the midst of a looming financial crisis. They had to spend beyond their means for the journey back home and the hospital facilities. Now without a job, they are concerned about meeting both ends.

Dr. Uma has returned to Djibouti after leaving the baby safe at the hospital. A native of Kannur, Uma said she had to go back soon because she had to return the incubator to the

hospital in Djibouti.

The doctor said the Ministry of External Affairs and embassy officials were very helpful in bringing the baby and the mother to India. Parvathi is under the care of Dr. P Sasidharan, Dr. C. Jayasree and Dr. Ashwin Prabhu in the Amrita hospital.